

# PEOPLE & THINGS *By ATTICUS*

**B**EFORE we touch upon some of the lighter incidents in the human comedy I think we should note the significant financial investment which Canada is prepared to make in Great Britain. If the bid by the Massey-Harris-Ferguson combine for the Standard Motor shares is accepted, though the immediate gain in dollars will be quite small, the eventual gain may bring back the smile which seemed to have disappeared from Chancellor Peter-Thorneycroft's face during the last fortnight.

Apparently the sale of the Standard Motor Company would not mean the disappearance of its chairman, Lord Tedder. Personally I am very glad because he is one of the few men who can look wistful while packing a prize-fighter's punch. His tone of voice would not change whether he was making a speech on Founder's Day or denouncing the devil. If he had taken to poker he would have made a fortune because no one can tell what goes on behind that gentle, slightly astonished look. The fact that he is a Marshal of the Royal Air Force merely adds colour to an intriguing and elusive personality.

## Indomitable

Now let me turn to another significant figure in the news who is quite unlike Lord Tedder in appearance, intellect and character. I refer to Sir Roy Dobson, of the Hawker-Siddeley group, who has con-



Sir Roy Dobson

tracted to build the first atomic tanker, a giant rivaling the size of the Queen Mary.

No doubt Sir Roy keeps some of his thoughts to himself but by nature he is straightforward rather than elusive. In fact he has a strength of mind and of spirit that make a perfect unison.

In the desperate days when the Battle of Britain was nearing its climax his workers stayed at their machines for twelve hours a day or twelve hours a night for seven days a week. How long could they sustain such an effort? The shop stewards were fomenting trouble and it seemed as if a concession in hours of work would have to be made. But such was Sir Roy's indomitable spirit that by his personal example he persuaded his workers to go on until they dropped—and they gave everything they had. Some day the whole story of that mad, glorious period must be told—and it would not be without

humour or irony—for the achievement was incredible.

## Farewell, The Carlton

**I**N obedience to the law of change the demolition of the Carlton Hotel is now well under way. The Carlton, with its romantic, "Grand Hotel" atmosphere, was an hotel subtly different from all others in London. Oppenheimer characters with fabulous cigarette-holders would survey each other across the famous Palm Court, now a rubble-strewn space bare to the sky.

The ballroom, still with a roof, is a little better off but the bedrooms are an even sadder sight. I did not see Room 504, but in 104, with the number still carefully on the door, a painting of a bowl of roses faces across the filthy floorboards to an elegant fireplace. One wonders what famous personalities of the 1920s and 30s may still remember that picture of roses in Room 104 at the Carlton. The dirty, lack-lustre windows gaze like the eyes of dead men at the passing traffic in the street below.

Mr. Les Carter, the foreman of the party who have been working there since July 1, has been pulling down buildings for thirty years. If not a man without a soul, he is certainly one who cast aside sentiment some time during those years. His last job was the Tivoli, and before that the Junior United Services Club. He does not know whether he will be pulling down the St. James's Theatre. "There are so many firms like us," he explained.

As I left the Carlton for the last time, through the tradesmen's entrance, two elderly gentlemen of the type which the evening newspapers call clubmen were standing on the threshold, looking glumly around. At least, I thought, they might have removed their bowlers.

## Mad Hatters

**A**ND now may I, with the licence of ink, dare to venture into a region where no normal man should put foot? But first let me explain. This is the period of the year when London is at its best, and like Robert Louis Stevenson I love to walk the streets and gaze upon the human comedy as it is played before our eyes. Since we poor drab creatures of men wear the same style of clothes year after year it is the women who have to supply the infinite variety in the realm of costume.

But let us drop the "infinite variety" at once. For weeks and months on end (or so it seems) all women have been wearing if not the same hat the same style of hat. It is something between the headgear of a pageboy and a lift operator. It has no curves, no design, no elegance and not even piquancy. As a destroyer of mystery it is deadly unless we except the mystery of why they go on wearing the wretched things. Yet such is the timidity of the female, such is the discipline of the monstrous regiment, that no woman with any pretence to smartness dare discard it.

Are there no rebels among them? Does it matter nothing to them that we who are the lesser half of the race would rather gaze at the evening paper or even the crawling traffic of the road than look

upon these Round-Hatted Heads that have created an all-time low in feminine absurdity? Is there no Boadicea, to rouse her sisters to revolt? Is there no Vivien Leigh to protest against the uglification of her sex? Or must we men steal our wives' hats and dump them in the Serpentine?

## Gallery Louts

**I** ABANDON my benign mood in turning to those louts in the gallery who saw fit to boo the Bristol Old Vic production of "Oh! My Papa!" at the Garrick Theatre. Here was a pleasing cast in a musical play which was decorated with mild humour and, with taste, and



Miss Elizabeth Montagu

contained that familiar tune "Oh! my Papa!" with its nostalgic charm that calls for repetition upon repetition.

No one forced the boos to their first night, but even though they were not gentlemen they were at least males and might have had the delicacy to realise that this is one of the few theatrical productions that ever extolled the virtues of the male. The charms and goodness of Mama have been praised so often on the stage that we should have been grateful that for once Papa was given precedence. Let us hope that the charming adapter of the piece, Elizabeth Montagu, will be present at the three-hundredth performance.

## Old Wounds Bleed

**M**EMORIES have been crowding upon me as I read of the visit of Mr. Khrushchev and his familiars to the quaint old city of Prague. I was there in 1938 when the local German Nazis were fomenting trouble and the Czechs were occupying the defence line on the Sudeten boundary. The Austrian Empire may have been ramsackable, but it was a work of genius as well as of history. When, however, Hitler occupied Austria while the Western Allies made no move to stop him the flank of the Czech defence had gone.

Jan Masaryk was a man of spirit and an engaging wit, but he knew that his country was doomed once Hitler was in Vienna. Yet not even his quick imagination could have foreseen Czechoslovakia as part of Russia's satellite empire as it is today.

Irony could go no farther than the speeches of Mr. Khrushchev in Prague. Over and over again he stated that he and the Czech Communist leaders had reached complete understanding, and that there was not a false note in the sweet harmony. I can believe that. The instinct of personal survival persists even under Communism.

Sometimes I think it is not

good to travel too much. Old wounds bleed when memory is roused by contemporary events.

## Poems in Stone

**I**F anyone, inspired by my recent competition, sees his own garden as the background to a "folly," he has only to visit the grounds of the old Crystal Palace where the L.C.C. are putting up for sale some 200 urns and statues. So far, I hear, only twenty-five people have shown sufficient courage to make serious bids.

On my tour of the site last week I found an atmosphere of what Chaplin once called "elegant melancholy": smoke from the great fire still blackened some of the figures; grass grew long from the cracks in the terraces; and the ponds were choked with unhusbanded lilies.

What prospective owners have offered will remain a secret until July 31 when the sealed envelopes will be opened at County Hall and the various Lots presented to the highest bidders. No "frivolous offers" are being considered; on the other hand if anyone would like to buy the lot, there is nothing to stop him.

The trouble is that many of the pieces weigh up to five tons and the cost of cartage is going to be a bit of a problem. It was this that stopped me from sending off a plea for "Modesty," a shy Victorian, with one toe pointed demurely, and a neat way of raising her draperies to her bosom.

The L.C.C. is of course moved by no such considerations. "All we know," they say, "is that we're extremely anxious to get rid of them."

## Jobs for the Boys

**M**Y colleague Maurice Wiggin has been staying at a small (thirty-room) hotel in Devon. Alerted by the waiter's accent and general air, he made a small-scale investigation into the changing social habits of our time and came up with the following information:

Of the five waiters, two were Cambridge undergraduates, one a Minor Scholar of Trinity reading classics, one a county school at Selwyn, reading history. A third waiter, from London University, had won a travelling scholarship which will take him in the autumn to Boston, Massachusetts, on a three-year course in public relations.

One of the two hotel porters was also reading history at Cambridge.

The four university men had all worked during previous vacations at a wide variety of jobs—labourer, refrigerator attendant, typist, hospital orderly, bakery hand, nursery gardener, canvasser, post office worker and interpreter.

## People and Words

The best drug for the relief of pain is alcohol—and I don't mean anything pharmaceutical, but whisky!

—PROFESSOR CHARLES ROE, Professor of Surgery, London University.

I tried to stop smoking cigarettes by telling myself I just didn't want to smoke—but I didn't believe myself!

—BARBARA KELLY.

No man-made device since the shield and lances of the ancient knights quite fulfils a man's ego like a car. It endows him with status and a sense of power and independence.

—SIR WILLIAM ROOTES

The B.B.C. is one of the most wonderful things in Western civilisation and the Third Programme is the most valuable jewel in its crown.

—SIR LAWRENCE OLIVER